

2022 Testimony
Interim Health Care Committee
North Dakota Department of Health
June 16, 2022

Good afternoon, Chairman Weisz, and members of the Committee. My name is Tim Wiedrich. I am the Director of the Emergency Medical Systems (Division) for the North Dakota Department of Health. I am here to provide information relating to the status of the administrative rules for community paramedics.

During the 67th Legislative Assembly, the section of the North Dakota Century Code (§ 23-27-04.3) directing the Department of Health to adopt rules prescribing emergency medical services personnel training, testing, certification, licensure, and quality review standards was amended to include community emergency medical services personnel. This change in the Century Code required a corresponding update to Chapter 33-36-01 of the North Dakota Administrative Code.

After the end of the session, the Division began the rule development process; however, due to the appearance of the COVID Delta variant and the accompanying stress on health care facilities and patient transportation, Division staff was temporarily reassigned to the COVID response.

After about six months of the COVID response assignment, the Division could return to its regularly assigned duties. Although our Division was able to begin more program-related activities, many entities of the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) System continued to be overwhelmed by COVID-related responsibilities. Our contributing members, including our advisory committee and EMS community members, were on the front lines of the

pandemic. Patient care and the safety of community members become the top priority. The Division put out weekly COVID-related best practice guidance for EMS personnel, helped with dispersing COVID funding for ambulance services, and assisted with staffing shortages statewide. The Division also implemented the State ambulance fleet to assist with transfers and hospital bed capacity issues.

As the response moved from a pandemic state of emergency to more of an endemic state, the Division's attention was redirected toward the system of care work with a renewed focus on developing community paramedic rules. This process involved an internal review of EMS personnel rules to ensure best practice and to set a precedence for instructors, training institutes, and certification by nationally recognized standards. This internal review resulted in a comprehensive revision of the entire EMS personnel chapter due to language regarding licensure levels no longer existing, addressing the century code provisions, the need to develop and incorporate standards for community emergency medical personnel, and the desire to be forward-thinking and anticipate changes in EMS culture and care. The EMS rule revision changes addressed personnel training, certification, licensure, emergency medical services, personnel instructors, training institutions, and quality review.

Along with reviewing current EMS personnel rules, the North Dakota University System (NDUS) was consulted on the ability to develop a community paramedic training program, a necessary step in determining requirements for community paramedic designation. Historically, North Dakota licensed paramedics attended the community paramedic program in Hennepin, Minnesota. To date, there is no interest from the NDUS in developing an in-state community paramedic training program. The Division will continue to pursue in-state training opportunities, but for the time being, interested parties will need to attend Hennepin's community paramedic training program.

EMS personnel rules, including the community emergency medical services personnel, were drafted, and submitted to the Department of Health legal counsel for review in March. The rules were dispersed to the Emergency Medical Services Advisory Council (EMSAC) for review and commentary before the scheduled quarterly meeting in April. EMSAC chose to address the proposed rules during a special meeting scheduled for May 19, 2022. Quorum was not achieved. Individuals present did provide feedback, but no official action could be taken. A follow up meeting has been scheduled for July 7, 2022.

The advisory committee to the EMS system, EMSAC, is comprised of EMS personnel from across the state including representation from the North Dakota EMS Association, EMS personnel educators, rural EMS squad leaders, paramedics, and EMTs. This advisory committee provides expert opinion and feedback to the division with the best interest of the success of EMS services and the public in mind. EMSAC represents all types of stakeholders including rural and urban areas, critical access hospitals, and tertiary centers. The committee's recommendations are invaluable not only to the system of care but to the rules development and revision process. Once a recommendation is received from EMSAC, the Division is prepared to proceed with the administrative rule process through the Department of Health and Human Services.

Thank you for the opportunity to report to you on the progress of the community emergency medical services personnel rules. I am available to answer any questions you might have regarding the ongoing implementation of this program.